

Washington, D.C. — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), a longtime champion of Corps reform and co-founder of the Congressional Corps Reform Caucus, expressed optimism about the Water Resources Development Act of 2003 (WRDA), marked up in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee today. The legislation has been delayed for the past year because it did not adequately address the concerns of legislators and activists pushing for needed reforms to the Corps.

“I want to congratulate Chairman Young, Ranking Member Oberstar, Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member Costello on their bi-partisan efforts to move WRDA forward,” said Blumenauer. “Although the Corps of Engineers often takes the blame when Congress and other outside forces politicize the process, the WRDA bill before the Committee today is an improvement over previous proposals.”

The Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for the construction and maintenance of over 1,500 federal water resources projects in the United States. In recent years, several government and private studies have found that the Army Corps of Engineers’ process is often biased in favor of large projects, lacks adequate environmental safeguards in its planning process and has manipulated data to secure approval for major projects. As a result, there is a large and growing consensus that the Corps’ process must be modernized to ensure that civil works projects are economically and environmentally sound.

Blumenauer supports efforts to ensure that Corps projects are economically justified and based on sound science by requiring the agency to establish an independent review process for Corps projects and to revise its guidelines for evaluating projects. The WRDA bill being considered by the Committee today includes a compromise between Corps reform advocates and others on these issues. It also includes a compromise amendment authored by Blumenauer providing the Corps more flexibility in its planning process to take into account economic benefits of environmental restoration projects and environmental benefits of economic restoration projects.

“This WRDA bill is a small step forward,” argued Blumenauer. “I’ll continue to work for even more ambitious reforms as Congress moves forward with this WRDA bill and in future WRDA bills.”